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Young Pacific Leaders Sports Programme Off to a Strong Start in Aotearoa, New Zealand

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 Young Pacific Leaders Sports Programme Off to a Strong Start in Aotearoa, New Zealand

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 Women in Sport Aotearoa

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The second cohort of the Young Pacific Leaders Sports Programme has officially begun, with 14 dynamic young Pacific women gathering alongside Women in Sport Aotearoa (WISPA) and Pasifika Sisters in Sport (Pasifika SiS) in Tāmaki Makaurau, Auckland. The programme has started off strong, with the participants engaging in meaningful sessions and activities filled with energy, learning, and connection, setting the stage for transformative leadership development and cultural exchange that will positively impact their communities back home.

On Day 1, the women, alongside WISPA, Pasifika SiS and their host orgnaisation mentors were welcomed with a heartfelt pōwhiri at Ngāti Ōtara Marae, setting the tone for the days ahead. The sessions begun with Pasifika SiS’ Fila Fuamatu introducing "Whakawhanaungatanga – Fofola e fala," focusing on creating safe and open spaces for connection and conversation. This was followed by a talanoa on Pacific leadership, where participants shared personal and cultural models of leadership, paving the way for deep reflection on the qualities of leadership that will help them thrive both in sport and in their communities.

The second day of the programme saw the participants engage in a wānanga focused on indigenous leadership models, specifically Māori perspectives on mana-enhancing leadership. Delivered by Tū Mātau Ora Co-Founder and WISPA rōpū member Ness Mill, the session also included a physical component with a Māori games (kēmu), allowing the women to embody leadership through action. They also heard from Sport New Zealand Women & Girls Lead Emma Evans, providing valuable insights into the current sports strategy and its alignment with the values of empowerment and inclusion. WISPA CEO Nicky van den Bos then shared her experience and learnings from attending the Global Sports Mentoring Programme late last year in the United States, and the day finished with a session by WISPA Co-Founder Sarah Leberman on tetra mapping - discovering preferred behaviours.

“We are already seeing the powerful impact this programme is having on these women,” said Nicky van den Bos, CEO of Women in Sport Aotearoa (WISPA). “In just the first couple of days, the participants have begun to build meaningful connections with one another and have embraced the opportunity to learn from both Pacific and Māori perspectives on leadership. This will undoubtedly shape their work and leadership back in their communities.”

Pasifika Sisters in Sport Co-Chair, Candice Apelu Mariner, added, “It’s inspiring to witness these women come together and immediately start applying the principles of leadership, both personal and cultural. Their experiences in the programme will equip them to create real, lasting change when they return to their communities. This is more than just an individual journey; it’s about strengthening sports cultures across the Pacific.”


The participants come from diverse backgrounds, including soccer, netball, rugby, athletics, and more. They are already reflecting on how they can take the leadership lessons learned in New Zealand and implement them in their home countries. This is especially important as many of the women have expressed a commitment to empowering other women and girls in their communities through sport.

“I’m learning so much already about how leadership can be transformative, not just in sport but in all areas of life,” said one of the participants, Aline Teumohenga from Tonga. “This experience is going to help me advocate for better health outcomes for women and children in my community, and I’m excited to share what I’m learning with others back home.”

The programme continues with more leadership workshops, and a mentorship and learning experience with sporting organisations in Auckland, furthering the cultural exchange between the Pacific and New Zealand.

The Young Pacific Leaders Women’s Sports Programme, supported by the U.S. Department of State, provides these emerging leaders with the tools, networks, and resources they need to bring about real change in their communities. With just a few days of the programme already complete, the impact is clear — these women are not just leaders in their own right, but catalysts for change across the Pacific region.


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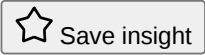


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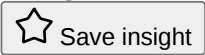
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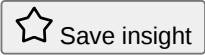
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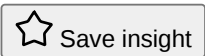


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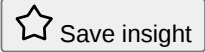
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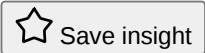
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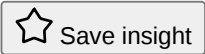
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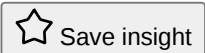
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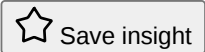
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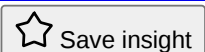
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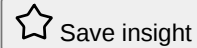
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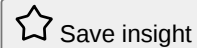
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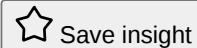
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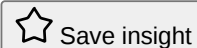


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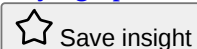
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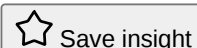
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